

COLLEGE PLANNING

a checklist for

WHAT TO DO IN
HIGH SCHOOL



Education Prep Centers



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INTRODUCTION

**HOW TO USE
THIS GUIDE**

EDUCATION PREP CENTERS | COLLEGE PLANNING - A CHECKLIST FOR WHAT TO DO IN HIGH SCHOOL

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Planning for college is kind of a big deal. There are a lot of steps in the process, and if you don't know what they are, well...
then you don't know what they are.

This guide will provide you with the information you need to start taking action right away. You'll learn where to start. You'll
see what to do throughout your time in high school.

Find your grade level and the season you're in, and then backtrack from there:

- What have you completed already?
(Check it off the list)
- What do you still need to do?
(Put it on your calendar)
- What do you need help with?
(Ask a parent or counselor)

Add future tasks to your calendar, too, so you're not forgetting, and keep your checklist handy as you continue up until graduation and beyond.

Best wishes to you in all of your college planning!

- Dr. Gena

HERE WE GO...

the list



check 'em off

GRADE 9

EDUCATION PREP CENTERS | COLLEGE PLANNING - A CHECKLIST FOR WHAT TO DO IN HIGH SCHOOL

GRADE 9 - FALL

MEET YOUR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR.

Visit with your high school guidance counselor to get a clear picture of what the next four years should look like course-wise, and introduce yourself - you'll be seeing a lot of him or her over the coming years!

Make sure you're choosing the appropriate core college preparatory courses that colleges will require for admissions on your transcript. Most colleges require 4 years of English, at least 3 years of social studies, 3 years of math and 3 years of science. Many require 2 years of a foreign language, too.

CREATE A COLLEGE BINDER.

This will be an invaluable tool that you'll use throughout your time in high school; start now to keep great records of everything you'll need for college applications! Use a binder or folder to keep records of:

- Report cards
- Awards or honors you receive
- Extracurricular activities, community organizations or clubs you're involved with (including dates)
- Paid and volunteer jobs you hold (including dates)
- Documents/brochures you receive from colleges
- Letters of recommendation
- Usernames and passwords to college websites

•*This checklist!*

GRADE 9 - FALL

GET GOOD GRADES.

Your grades definitely matter starting now, so make sure you're keeping up with your work and you're asking for help when needed.

Your GPA is one of the first things colleges will look at for admissions, so take this very seriously from the start.

GET INVOLVED IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES.

Colleges look for students who are involved in their school and in their community. Get involved in groups, teams, organizations or clubs that will be fun and fulfilling for you and help you to develop as a more well-rounded person.

Consider volunteering with an organization you care about.

REFLECT ON YOUR INTERESTS AND FUTURE CAREER.

Think about what really motivates and interests you and what you might like to do for a career.

You don't have to be certain of your career path yet, of course, but it's great to start thinking in this way right now in order to help guide your activities in high school. It'll also help you to choose some interesting elective courses to get a more in-depth taste of things that appeal to you.

GRADE 9 - WINTER / SPRING

ASK FAMILY MEMBERS & FRIENDS ABOUT THEIR COLLEGES.

Start talking to your family members and friends who've gone to college and ask about their experiences.

What did they like about their college?

What didn't they like?

Visit relatives or friends at their college campuses to get a good feel for the experience.

BEGIN RESEARCHING COLLEGES ONLINE.

Do a little research on your own about what's out there, and consider what type of college, location and size appeals to you most.

You can visit your guidance counselor for more support with this, too.

GRADE 9 - SUMMER

- **BUILD YOUR ACTIVITY / WORK RESUME.**

When school's out, make sure you remain active: volunteer, get a job, join an enrichment program or camp with a specialty focus. Anything you can do to show leadership and development in a certain skill or interest will look great on your application!

And remember that it's the quality (not quantity) that really counts here.

GRADE 10

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GRADE 10 - FALL

MEET YOUR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR AGAIN.

Chat with the counselor to ensure you're enrolled in the appropriate college prep courses throughout high school to keep you on the right track. Your course load should be challenging – college admissions officers really like to see students set the bar high for themselves! Ask the counselor about Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

Also, ask when and where you can attend a college fair.

TAKE THE PSAT EXAM.

Most sophomores will take this exam in October as a “practice” for the PSAT and SAT they'll take in junior year.

It's always best to be prepared and know what's on the test, so head over to the College Board website to download and take a PSAT practice exam.

ATTEND A COLLEGE FAIR.

College fairs are where representatives from different colleges gather to distribute information about their schools and look for the right students to attend. They may be held at your school or a local community center.

Prepare yourself with questions about academics and campus life, and learn a lot more about which out there and what schools might be a great fit for you.

GRADE 10 - FALL

CONTINUE YOUR PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVITIES.

Keep consistent in your involvement in extracurricular activities and volunteer opportunities. College admissions folks really like to see students who are involved over time and demonstrate growth as a student and in maturity and leadership.

A deep involvement in one or two things is better than spreading yourself thin between too many!

GRADE 10 - SPRING

- **KEEP UP WITH THOSE GRADES!**

There's a lot going on during the school year, but it's so important to remain focused on keeping that GPA as high as you can.

- **CONSIDER TAKING SAT SUBJECT TEST.**

Some colleges require an SAT Subject Test or two for admissions - especially the more selective colleges. Check college websites directly to find out if those you're considering require or recommend you take it.

If you're currently enrolled in a course that would translate well to one of the Subject Tests, consider taking it this spring while the material is fresh in your brain.

- **TOUR A COLLEGE OR TWO.**

Get a much better feel for what college life is like by touring a couple of colleges in your area, or close to somewhere you're visiting. It's best to visit when school is in session, if you can, to really understand what campus life is like.

Contact the college directly or check the website to arrange for a tour for you and a parent.

GRADE 10 - SUMMER

GET A SUMMER JOB OR VOLUNTEER POSITION.

Admissions officers love to see students working, volunteering or interning throughout the summer months – it demonstrates dedication, growth and maturity.

RESEARCH AND APPLY FOR SCHOLARSHIPS.

Talk to your counselor at school about scholarship opportunities and use an online scholarship search tool to discover what's potentially out there for you.

Check with the companies your parents work for, and with local community groups, like churches or Elks clubs, too.

The more scholarships you apply for, the better chances of more funding for college!

TAKE A PRACTICE PSAT EXAM.

You'll take this exam in October, and it's always best to go in prepared! Visit the College Board website to download a practice PSAT exam. Take it in a distraction-free area and strictly time yourself according to instructions. It's good to take this in the summer and work on your weaker areas before the October test date.

If you receive a high score on the test, consider taking a prep course for the PSAT exam to take advantage of the National Merit Scholarship opportunities.

GRADE 11

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GRADE 11 - FALL

- ☐ **MEET WITH THE GUIDANCE COUNSELOR. YET AGAIN.**

This time, bring mom or dad.

Junior year is the heaviest in terms of college planning, and you'll need that support to know for sure that you're on the right track with your courses and in developing your college list.

Consider taking AP courses, which could transfer into college credits. Check in on your GPA and class rank, too.

- ☐ **GRADES. THEY'RE STILL IMPORTANT.**

Even if your grades haven't been as high as you'd like, you still have time to improve them and your GPA. Remember - ask for the help you need!

- ☐ **TAKE YOUR PSAT.**

This test is a precursor to the SAT exam and will give you a good glimpse of what to expect.

You took the practice exam over the summer and practiced the content you needed a little work on, so you're ready!

You'll take this in October.

GRADE 11 - FALL

MAKE A COLLEGE LIST.

Now's the time to really dig in to find the colleges that are the right match for you!

Do some research online and with your guidance counselor to find schools that best fit your criteria, such as size, location, academic majors, cost and social climate.

CONNECT WITH COLLEGES THAT INTEREST YOU.

You want to know more about the colleges you're interested in, so connect with admissions offices via email or phone to request an information packet.

Tip: Many colleges will track the number of times a student contacts them to gauge interest, so this can look really nice on the application later on.

GRADE 11 - FALL

☐ **PREPARE FOR THE SAT AND/OR ACT EXAMS.**

It's a very competitive college admissions climate out there, and more and more students are preparing for these exams before heading in on test day.

There are free test prep courses online, classes at the high school or more personalized, 1-1 prep with a tutor. You can also find books dedicated to helping self-motivated students prepare themselves for the exams. Whichever method you choose, it's important that you prepare!

☐ **REGISTER ONLINE FOR THE SAT AND/OR ACT EXAMS.**

I highly recommend that you take more than one of either the SAT or ACT in your junior year so that you have more than one set of scores to choose from for admissions. Do that in the fall for a winter/spring exam or two spring exams.

Tip: It's important that you don't enter college names on the registration form, however – you want to be able to see the score report before you decide which scores you will release to colleges!

GRADE 11 - WINTER

ARRANGE FOR COLLEGE VISITS.

Contact the colleges on your list to arrange for college tours with your mom or dad. If you're able to meet when school is in session (read: not during spring break), that's best - that way you can really get a feeling for the atmosphere of each school. But, if spring break's all you can do, go for it!

Get some dates on the calendar and start touring.

This is a good time of year to take your first ACT and/or SAT exam to 1) get a good feel for the test and the testing environment and 2) to see where you are starting out on the exams.

Once scores are back (typically about 2 1/2 weeks after taking the test) you can determine what kind of prep you should do for the next one you'll take in the spring.

GRADE 11 - WINTER

CONSIDER TAKING SAT SUBJECT TESTS, IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY.

Some colleges require an SAT Subject Test or two for admissions - especially the more selective colleges.

If you're currently enrolled in a course that would translate well to one of the Subject Tests, consider taking it this spring while the material is fresh in your brain.

LEARN ABOUT FINANCIAL AID OPTIONS.

Collect information about aid options from the financial aid counselors at the schools you're considering. Find out if your school is sponsoring a financial aid night and attend with mom or dad.

You'll also need to learn the difference between grants, loans, work study and scholarships to make the very best decisions for school.

Do some online searching! Start with the [Federal Student Aid](#) website.

GRADE 11 - SPRING

- CONTINUE TO PREP FOR THE SPRING SAT AND / OR ACT EXAMS.**

It's best to prep all the way up until the test date so that the content and strategies you need to be successful on the exam are fresh in your mind.

Taking practice exams is an important part of preparing for the test.

- TAKE THE SAT OR ACT EXAM FOR THE SECOND TIME.**

Typically this will be in March for SAT or April for ACT. This ensures you have other opportunities to take the exam if you're not satisfied with your score in May or June, or in the fall of your senior year.

- NARROW DOWN TO YOUR "TOP SCHOOLS" LIST.**

Consider all of the research and visits you've done over the past year or so into potential colleges and determine the top 5-10 colleges you'd most like to attend to really streamline your focus from here on out.

GRADE 11 - SPRING

REVIEW / RECORD COLLEGE APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES.

Learn what is required from each of the colleges you're considering applying to, including essays, letters of recommendation, and where you can find the application itself. This is most easily done via each college's website; simply find the "applying" or "admissions" webpages and review those requirements.

Use a calendar to track application deadlines.

You'll be applying in the fall!

REQUEST LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION.

Most colleges will require at least one or two letters of recommendation from folks like your counselor, teachers, coaches, or other adults who can vouch for you and make you shine as a prospective student for the school.

Approach potential letter writers to give them enough time to work on your letter, and so that you're getting to them before other students are.

Some schools require a certain person, like a counselor, to write one for you. Be sure you're aware of those requirements so you're asking the right people.

GRADE 11 - SPRING

- ☐ **MEET WITH YOUR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR TO PREPARE FOR SENIOR YEAR.**

Although you're applying in the fall, colleges still consider your senior year courses and grades, so put together a course load with your guidance counselor that's still challenging for you.

Be sure you're all set and on track for graduation!

- ☐ **CONTINUE TO RESEARCH AND APPLY FOR SCHOLARSHIPS.**

In addition to using your counselor and online search tools as a resource for finding scholarships, check out the websites of the colleges you're considering to find out what scholarships they have available for students.

Apply, apply, apply!

GRADE 11 - SUMMER

- CONTINUE TO VISIT COLLEGES.**

Tour the colleges that are at the top of your list.

Make appointments to talk with the admissions and financial aid folks. You can also arrange for personal interviews at this time with some of the more selective colleges that recommend them.

- MAINTAIN A SUMMER JOB OR VOLUNTEER POSITION.**

Admissions officers love to see students working, volunteering or interning throughout the summer months – it demonstrates dedication, growth and maturity.

GRADE 11 - SUMMER

COMPLETE THE ESSAYS FOR YOUR COLLEGE APPLICATIONS.

Many colleges require you to complete the Common Application for admissions, and others require you complete their own forms. You can find the college essay prompts on the application.

Make sure to finish essays over the summer months so that you're not competing with other priorities in the fall of your senior year and so you can take your time with the essay – it's a very important piece of the application that will make you shine as a student uniquely qualified to attend the school!

PREPARE FOR EARLY ACTION.

If you plan to apply early action to any of the schools on your list, start working on your application right away – the deadline for that will be coming up sooner than others.

GRADE 12

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GRADE 12 - FALL

GRADES. STILL IMPORTANT.

You're in the home stretch, and it still matters how you're performing in school. Keep up that GPA!

KEEP VISITING COLLEGES!

If you haven't visited all of the colleges on your top 5-10, now's the time to do so.

It's a great time to tour colleges, as school is definitely in session! You can talk with students and faculty, and you can sit on a couple of classes.

REGISTER AND TAKE THE ACT, SAT OR SAT SUBJECT TESTS AS NECESSARY.

Take these in the early fall. Once you get those score reports back, choose which you'll be sending to the colleges of your choice.



COMPLETE YOUR APPLICATIONS.

These take some time, so start early - far in advance of the deadlines! Use the records you've been keeping in your college binder to complete the applications.

Have someone proofread the applications for you after completion, and be sure you're sending everything to the colleges that they require.

GRADE 12 - FALL

MEET AGAIN WITH THE GUIDANCE COUNSELOR.

He or she will help you to stay on track with admissions requirements. The counselor will also send transcripts, score reports and letters of recommendation to the colleges you choose.



KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON THE CALENDAR FOR DEADLINES.

With college applications, financial aid, test registration and everything else in between, there are lots of deadlines to keep track of.

Keep all of your records in your college binder, and keep all of those deadlines on a single college calendar.



CONTINUE THE SCHOLARSHIP AND GRANT SEARCH.

Now that you know which colleges you're applying to for sure, connect with their financial aid offices (if you haven't already) to learn about scholarship and grant opportunities.

GRADE 12 - WINTER

FOLLOW UP ON YOUR APPLICATIONS.

Check with your guidance counselor to ensure all forms have been sent to the appropriate colleges. Then, check with the schools you've applied with to make sure they've received all of the necessary documents.

COMPLETE THE FAFSA.

You can receive these forms from the guidance counselor or apply online. They're released on October 1 - the earlier you apply, the more aid there is for you to receive.

Tip : Even if you think your family earns too much money for aid, fill it out. There's no income cut-off that disqualifies a family from aid, so not completing the form means you might be leaving money on the table.

SEND MID-YEAR SENIOR GRADE REPORTS TO COLLEGES.

Your guidance counselor will help you to get this out to schools – colleges still want to see how you're doing!

GRADE 12 - SPRING

- CHECK THE MAIL FOR NOTIFICATIONS FROM COLLEGES.**
Now it really gets exciting. You should receive word from colleges with an admission decision by March/April.

- CHECK FOR FINANCIAL AID AWARDS.**
These should arrive by early March if you filled out the form early. Compare the financial aid packages you receive. Contact each college's financial aid office if you have any questions at all.

- PREPARE FOR AP EXAMS.**
If you're taking AP exams, now's the time to prep for those to receive college credit.

- VISIT YOUR CHOSEN COLLEGE BEFORE ACCEPTING. DECIDE ON A COLLEGE.**
Now, with your acceptances and financial aid offers known, you can make a decision about where you're going to attend. Let the colleges know if you're going to attend by May 1, and submit any subsequent paperwork that's required.

- SEND A FINAL TRANSCRIPT.**
Ask your guidance counselor to send your final high school transcript to your chosen college.

- GRADUATE!**
Congratulations!

GRADE 12 - SUMMER

- SIGN UP FOR AND ATTEND ORIENTATION AT YOUR NEW COLLEGE.**

Check the website for a schedule if you haven't received anything directly from the college yet. You'll learn where things are, meet some faculty, register for classes, get your student ID, etc. And take your parents, too!

- REGISTER FOR FALL CLASSES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.**

Those courses fill up FAST! And some of them require some pre-reading before attending in the fall, so be aware of that.

College advisers will help you with any questions you have as you go through this process. Definitely get in touch with them with any questions!

- BUY YOUR TEXTBOOKS.**

Check out places online where you can rent these, or purchase them outright online or in the school bookstore.

GRADE 12 - SUMMER

- SEND THANK YOU NOTES TO COUNSELORS AND OTHERS WHO HELPED YOU GET IN.**

Yep, good old fashioned ones with pen and paper. Teachers, counselors, coaches – anyone who supported you to get into college deserves appreciation in this way.

- LEARN TO DO YOUR OWN LAUNDRY.**

Things like this that you've taken for granted in the past will be essential for you to know when you're no longer around mom and dad.

Take some time this summer to learn some of the basics, and you'll be ready to head out there on your own and conquer college life!

CONGRATULATIONS

you've done it!



**GO CONFIDENTLY IN THE
DIRECTION OF YOUR DREAMS!**

live the life
,
you've
imagined.

-Thoreau



Hello!

I'M DR. GENA LESTER

I'm the founder of [Education Prep Centers](#).

I've worked in the education industry for 26 years as a teacher, principal, and college admission advisor. I spend lots of time helping parents and teenagers navigate the dreaded college admissions process, from freshman through senior year of high school.

When I'm not working on my blog or coaching families, I enjoy spending time with my husband, children, and grandchildren. We all enjoy playing board games, going to the theater, and exploring the beautiful Texas country together.

I support families directly through the college planning process in a couple of ways:

1. Private Coaching. Parents and teens who are Private Coaching clients work directly with me to develop a personalized plan (with action steps) and curated college list, in addition to working step-by-step through the admissions process. [Click here to learn about Private Coaching.](#)

2. EPC Campus. Parents and teens in the EPC Campus have 24/7 access to all of the tools and resources I use with my Private Coaching clients, in addition to receiving a personalized action plan, and participating in monthly group strategy calls. [Click here to learn about the EPC Campus.](#)

I hope to work with you to help take the stress and overwhelm out of the process.

HAVE QUESTIONS? Send them to gena@educationprepcenters.com.

And don't forget to check out the [Education Prep Centers blog](#) for useful + timely college planning information